

JOHN HECKEWAELDER'S 'TOADS' (APRIL 25th, 1773)

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In the pursuit of a far-reaching mission plan of the Moravian Church, to move all its Indian converts out of Pennsylvania and across the Ohio, a new mission field was opened, in 1771, among the friendly Delaware (or Lenni Lenape) Indians, in the Muskingum basin. In 1772, the Rev. David Zeisberger, Moravian head missionary, founded two mission stations on the Tuscarawas River, Schönbrunn and Gnadenhütten; and, in the the spring of 1773, John Heckewaelder, assistant missionary under Zeisberger, was commissioned to conduct, by water, a consignment of Indian converts from the mission of Friedensstadt, on the Great Beaver, in northwestern Pennsylvania, to the Tuscarawas missions. From April 13th to May 5th, 1773, he traveled, with his charges and their belongings in twenty-two canoes, down the Great Beaver and the Ohio, and then up the Muskingum and the Tuscarawas, to their final destination, Schönbrunn, near present-day New Philadelphia (Tuscarawas Co., Ohio).

John Heckewaelder's travel diary covering this river journey is extant; a manuscript, in the possession of the Moravian Archives, at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Written in a lively and personal German, it makes fascinating reading and provides much valuable information.

Being occupied, these days, with preparing it for publication, in both German and English, together with a series of other Moravian mission diaries, I came upon an entry which not only aroused my personal curiosity but may also be of interest to the readers of a science journal; especially, to students of local fauna and ecology.

The general situation of those river travelers, on April 25th, 1773, when Heckewaelder made that diary entry, was this: They had worn themselves to a frazzle, during the morning hours, dragging and shoving their canoes through shallow channels of the river. Hence, they decided to rest for the remainder of the day. They made camp for the night "near a huge rock" (the site of which could be located about halfway between Luke Chute Dam and Brokaw, on the east bank of the Muskingum). In true Indian fashion, some of them "at once built a sweating-oven to sweat out their fatigue; . . . others went out hunting a little and encountered buffaloes at which they shot but without success."

Now follows the part of Heckewaelder's diary entry, which aroused, not only my curiosity, as I have said, but also my exploring spirit. I quote: "This night we did not find much rest because of the vast number of toads [*Kröten*], which greatly annoyed us. The [Lenape] Indians, therefore, call this place *Tsquallutene*, that means, 'town of the toads.' About midnight, we had a terrible thunderstorm accompanied by heavy rain."

Of what species may these toads have been? Or were they not toads at all, but frogs? People frequently do not discriminate between 'toads' and 'frogs.'

I decided to find the answer to my question by local inspection; provided, of course, that not too radical a change in the nature of the habitat had taken place, since Heckewaelder's days, making the mere attempt to appear unreasonable. In any event, I was determined to go and see.

After having trained my ear, to distinguish the calls of various species of both toads and frogs, with the aid of excellent recordings, kindly lent to me by Dr. Edward S. Thomas, Curator of Natural History, The Ohio State Museum, I visited, in the afternoon of April 25th, 1952, the area where, most likely, Hecke-

waelder and his Indians had made their night camp, in 1773, and under very similar weather conditions, at that; only that, *this* year, there had been heavy rain in day-time. There still were dissolving rain clouds in the sky when, shortly before 7:00 P. M. (EST), I set out, on foot, from the farm-house, high above the Muskingum valley, of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Walker, to whom I am unendingly grateful for their wonderful kindness in extending to me the most gracious hospitality in their home, at an easy walking distance from the place, by the river,

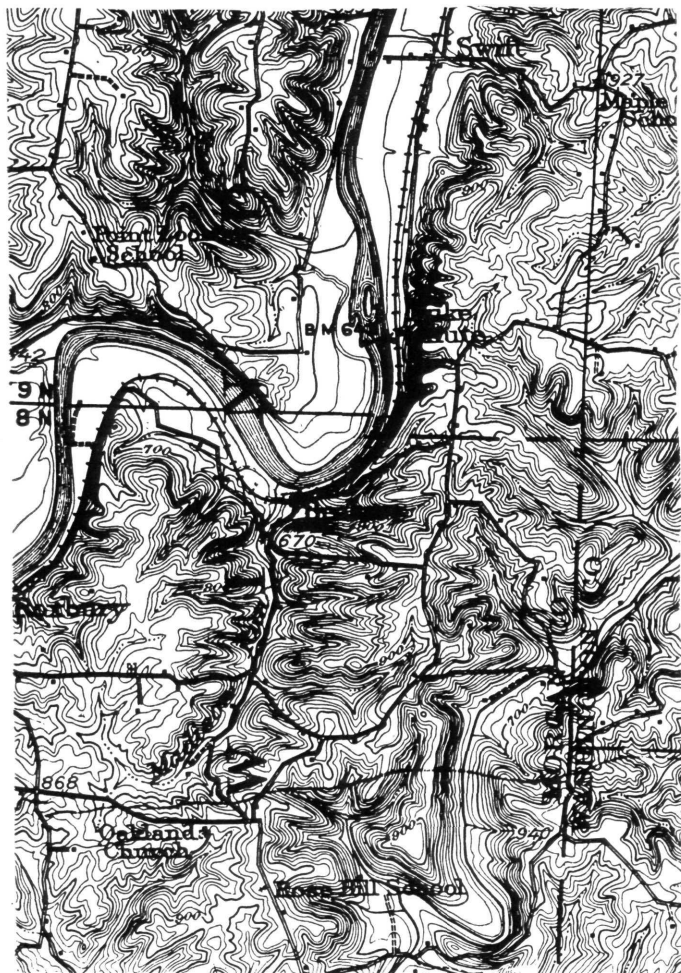


FIGURE 1. Map section showing the Madison Run flats west of Brokaw (Windsor Township, Morgan County, Ohio).

which I intended to visit. I also wish to express my deep gratitude to their daughter, Miss Louanna Walker, for having piloted me through the poorly mapped hills west of Waterford, where, without her competent initiative, I should have been hopelessly lost.

The place where Heckewaelder had his camp is roughly the site of present-day Brokaw, a small village of a few houses, in Windsor Twp., Morgan Co.; here,

the steep rocky proclivity which closely hugs the east bank of the Muskingum upstream from Luke Chute Dam sufficiently recedes from the river to make room for a camp site. All along the foot of that low terrace, there extend swampy flats formed by Madison Run which, coming from the south, here empties into the Muskingum (fig. 1, *U. S. Geol. Surv. Map*, State of Ohio, Caldwell Quadrangle, extreme SW section). Especially after heavy rains, these flats are very soggy with countless puddles and rills, making an ideal spawning ground for toads and frogs. The entire expanse, moreover, is loosely covered with shrubby willows. Except for the railroad dam that traverses these flats, from east to west, at Brokaw, close to, and almost parallel with, the river, the swampy bottom appears not to have been disturbed between 1773 and the present day.

Based on the supposition that, therefore, its fauna likewise has remained essentially unchanged, my expectations were fully borne out: starting at twilight (about 7:30 P.M. (EST)), and ever increasing in both volume and shrillness as darkness deepened, there rose from the swamp a batrachian chorus nothing short of ear-splitting. Not a single *toad's* typical call was heard, however; it was a pure chorus of *Hyla crucifera crucifera* Wied., the Spring Peeper, a tree-frog, which, by the way, is called a 'toad' by the people of the region. This misnomer confirms my belief that Heckewaelder, at least in the case at hand, likewise failed to discriminate between 'toad' and 'frog.' It is certain that his Lenape Indian converts did not either since their language has but one word, *tsquall*, for both 'toad' and 'frog'; it appears in the name, *Tsquallutêne*, by which the place was known among them, presumably from former experience. Heckewaelder's added explanation of the name, "das ist das Kröten Town" (he uses the English word 'town' in his German), clearly implies the meaning 'town of the toads,' which is likewise a connotation of the Lenape name. Were it meant to denote 'a human settlement (town) named after toads,' it would be *Krötenstadt* (-town), in German, and *tsquallutén-ünk* (with place-name suffix, -ünk [-üng, -ing]), in Lenape (Unami dialect).

Another observation made, that night, in the Madison Run flats helps to disclose the nature of the annoyance caused the campers of 1773 by "the vast number of toads": Some of the creatures, after but the briefest interruption, continued their singing, with the full glare of my flashlight close upon them; yet, not a single one could be seen; not a single one fled at my approach and jumped into the water, as other kinds of frog usually do. That permits the inference that the sleep of the weary travelers was disturbed solely by the noise of those Spring Peepers; for it seems out of the question that this particular kind of frog "annoyed" them by hopping or crawling about the camp.

LITERATURE CITED

- John Heckewaelder's Diary — Br[uder]. *John Heckewaelders Bericht von ihrer Reise zu Wasser von Langundoutenünk [Friedensstadt] nach Welhik Thuppeek [Schönbrunn] im April 1773.* MS, Moravian Mission Diaries, Envel. No. 15, fol. 200-204. Archives of The Moravian Church, Bethlehem, Pa.